

Marin County Transportation Sales Tax Expenditure Plan

Frequently Asked Questions

Why should Marin voters approve a sales tax for transportation when we already pay so much for bus rides and bridge tolls?

The Golden Gate Bridge District's tolls, Federal and State funds, and bus fares support transit to San Francisco. Local transit in Marin relies on Federal and State funds and fares, but not tolls. 79% of Marin residents' trips are within the county – that's the main cause of traffic congestion. In addition, funding for local transit services is insufficient to meet even the reduced service levels implemented in November 2003.

Marin's transportation needs are best met by a Marin agency allocating local funds. The sales tax expenditure plan addresses local bus service, completion of the Highway 101 carpool lane through San Rafael, road maintenance, and traffic congestion and safety near schools. The plan does not include funding for operation of a commuter train.

Aren't Marin's taxes too high already?

Marin's sales tax is the lowest in the Bay Area. Most other Bay Area counties already have a transportation sales tax.

What exactly are "matching funds", and how do they work?

State and Federal transportation grants pay the lion's share of most local transportation projects. To receive a grant, a county typically must provide 10 to 50 percent of a local project's cost. Marin has not been able to compete for grants to fund many local projects because we do not have a transportation tax to generate the local funding portion.

So-called "self-help" counties with guaranteed funding for the local portion of transportation projects are awarded more grants. The sales tax measure makes Marin a "self-help" county able to compete for State and Federal grants, which multiply the impact of the tax dollars.

What's in the plan?

There are four key strategies to improving Marin's traffic. The draft expenditure plan addresses them all:

- Local bus service, including special transit for seniors and the disabled. \$XX million
- Timely completion of the Highway 101 Carpool Lane Gap Closure Project through San Rafael despite the loss of State funding. XX million
- Maintenance and improvement of Marin's local transportation infrastructure, including roads, bikeways and sidewalks. XX million
- Safe Routes to Schools and other programs to reduce school-related congestion. XX million

Details of the expenditure plan are available at www.marintraffic.org.

Give me some specifics.

A few examples of specific projects funded by the sales tax:

- Completing the Highway 101 carpool lane through San Rafael will be completed seven years earlier than without the sales tax.
- The Safe Routes to School program, which reduced school-related congestion by 15%, ends after 2004 without new funding.
- School crossing guards for Sinaloa Middle School in Novato, Bahia Vista School in San Rafael, and 68 other locations.
- Higher frequency bus service on main corridors such as Sir Francis Drake, South Novato Boulevard, and Bridgeway.
- West Marin Stage Coach ends after 2004 without new funding.
- Special shuttle and taxi service for those with disabilities and for seniors – Marin's fastest growing age group – will be reduced significantly from current levels without new funding.

Why doesn't the plan allocate the money like I think it should?

The sales tax won't fund everything. It will raise enough to pay for only a portion of the needs spelled out in Marin's "Transportation Vision." People will disagree over the perfect allocation formula, but four years of public input and comment determined our most pressing priorities. The plan addresses the major causes of Marin County's congestion – Highway 101, school access and safety, inadequate transit, and deteriorating roads – and benefits the entire county.

How do we know that my area will get its share of funding, or that the funding decisions are fair? And who will keep us informed?

The sales tax expenditure plan ensures geographic equity for all areas of the county by dividing infrastructure funds based on population and road miles. In addition, transit and road projects will be evaluated according to numerous benchmark criteria such as passengers per mile or passengers per hour for transit routes, and average daily traffic or accident history for roads. All decisions will be made with opportunities for public input from all areas of the county. The Authority will be accountable to a 12-member Citizens Oversight Committee of private citizens who will review all expenditures and report annually to the public.

What's the deal with the carpool lane on Highway 101? I thought that was already funded.

Because of the State's budget problems, money earmarked for completing the carpool lane and other transportation projects has been "borrowed" to fund non-transportation programs under the terms of Proposition 42 approved by California voters in 2002. Without local funding, completion of the carpool lane project on Highway 101 through San Rafael has been pushed back to 2015.

Can't the State "borrow" the sales tax money, too?

No. The sales tax revenue goes directly to the Marin County Transportation Authority. Unlike Proposition 42, the measure has no provision for State diversion.

Isn't a sales tax regressive?

California reduces the impact of sales tax on low-income residents by exempting groceries, rent, healthcare and medicine, electricity, gas, and water. In addition, improved bus service and reduced-fare programs included in the plan greatly benefit low-income families and seniors.